

A3383

CARD FILE OF JAPANESE WORKS, COLLECTIONS, SITES, AND
INSTALLATIONS REQUIRING PROTECTION, 1946

National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC
2007

United States. National Archives and Records Administration.

Card file of Japanese works, collections, sites, and installations requiring protection, 1946.— Washington, DC : National Archives and Records Administration, 2007.

p. ; 23 cm.— (National Archives microfilm publications. Pamphlet describing ; A3383)

Consists of microfilm reproductions of a card file prepared by the Education Ministry of the Imperial Japanese Government in May 1946.

“These records are part of the Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, Record Group (RG)239.”—Introd.

1. Japan. Monbushō – Archives – Microform catalogs.
 2. American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas – Archives – Microform catalogs.
 3. World War, 1939–1945 – Confiscations and contributions – Japan – Archival resources.
 4. World War, 1939–1945 – Destruction and pillage – Japan – Archival resources.
 5. Cultural property – Protection – Japan – Archival resources.
- I. Title.

INTRODUCTION

On the 10 rolls of this microfilm publication, A3383, is reproduced a card file prepared by the Education Ministry of the Imperial Japanese Government in May 1946 that identifies cultural and historical sites in Japan requiring protection. These records are part of Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, Record Group (RG) 239.¹

The Commission's textual and photographic records have been described and reproduced as National Archives Microfilm Publication M1944, *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (the Roberts Commission), 1943–1946*. That publication contains all of the Roberts Commission's records except for two series that the Commission maintained in microfilm format, and that have been published as Microfilm Publication A3383, described herein, and A3380, *Microfilm Copies of Reports from the Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operations Received from the Allied Military Government, 1943–1946*.²

BACKGROUND

The American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, also known as the Roberts Commission, was established on August 20, 1943, and abolished on June 30, 1946. The Commission worked with the U.S. military, museum officials, art historians, and international commissions to protect European art, monuments, institutions, and records of cultural value from war-related damage or theft. In addition, the Commission aided in the restitution of public and private property appropriated by the Nazis and their German collaborators.

The idea of establishing the Roberts Commission grew out of discussions among American educators and museum officials about the potentially dangerous impact of the European war on historic works of art and artifacts. In the fall of 1942, the American Defense–Harvard Group, established by a group of Harvard University faculty two years earlier, began working with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to devise plans for protecting cultural property in areas that would soon be occupied by Allied military forces. Representatives of these groups plus officials of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art approached Supreme Court Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone, who was also a National Gallery of Art board member, with a proposal for a Federal commission that would protect and restitute Nazi-looted art. They also contacted military officials to enlist their support.

¹ Originally called the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe, the term “War Areas” was substituted for “Europe” on April 27, 1944, as a result of requests from the Navy Department that the Commission expand its scope to include the Far East.

² These series were identified by the National Archives in the Master Location Register as A1, Entries 72 and 93, respectively.

After discussing the matter with Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Chief Justice Stone wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in December 1942 to solicit his support. By June, the School of Military Government was training special officers in how to locate and protect works of artistic and historic significance in war zones. The Commission was established later that summer under the chairmanship of Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts. To facilitate contact with the Departments of War and State, its headquarters was located in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

The Roberts Commission cooperated with the U.S. Army in protecting cultural treasures, gathering information about damage to works of art and historic sites, compiling data on cultural property appropriated by the Axis Powers, and implementing restitution procedures. The Commission was instrumental in the War Department's establishment of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section and recommended armed forces personnel to serve in it. Working through the American Defense-Harvard Group and the ACLS Committee for the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas, the Commission supplied the Army with over 700 maps of important cultural centers in Allied- and enemy-occupied countries in Europe and the Far East. Artistic and historic monuments were identified on the maps and described on accompanying lists. The Commission prepared and distributed additional lists and handbooks to MFAA field officers to aid them in preparing official lists of sites to be protected; gave lectures to Civil Affairs officers on the care and preservation of art objects, monuments, and records; and made information from the MFAA field reports available to Government agencies and scholars. After the war, the Commission identified civilians to continue the work begun by the MFAA program.

The Roberts Commission worked with other national and Allied commissions and with the State Department in collecting information and developing policies related to cultural property restitution. It also played a role in the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) efforts to recover and restitute cultural and commercial property seized by the Japanese during World War II as well as to protect historically important sites.

The Roberts Commission served as an invaluable clearinghouse for information on war damage and art looting. As such, it enabled an untold number of historic monuments and buildings to be protected. In addition, the Commission's work helped achieve the restitution of millions of works of art and artifacts to their rightful owners; the prevention of looted art from being used to fund postwar Nazism; and the prosecution of war criminals involved with art looting.

When the Commission's activities came to a close in June 1946, its work was continued through the Occupied Areas Division of the State Department's Office of International and Cultural Affairs. The Roberts Commission's records were transferred to the custody of the National Archives at the time of the Commission's abolishment in 1946.

RECORDS DESCRIPTION

The records published here consist of 10 rolls of 35 mm microfilm, on which are reproduced a series of 3- x 5-inch index cards (the cards themselves now are not part of

RG 239) containing information on cultural and historical works and sites in Japan requiring protection. Each card lists the location, name, ownership, and current physical condition of the work or site, plus a short description or history. The card file was prepared by the Education Ministry of the Imperial Japanese Government in May 1946. Of particular note is the inclusion of native species of flora and fauna among those “works requiring protection.” The cards are arranged alphabetically by geographical district, and thereunder by city, village, or site.

RELATED RECORDS AND PUBLICATIONS

Textual Records in the National Archives

RECORDS OF ALLIED OPERATIONAL AND OCCUPATION HEADQUARTERS,
WORLD WAR II (RECORD GROUP 331)

Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Civil Information and Education Section

Several series in this section are useful for searching information concerning the protection of cultural sites. A folder title search of these series may be possible using NARA’s Archival Records Catalog (ARC) on our web site at www.archives.gov.

Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Civil Property Custodian

Several series in this unit are useful for searching information concerning property seized by the Japanese and its restitution. A folder title search of these series may be possible using NARA’s Archival Records Catalog (ARC) on our web site at www.archives.gov.

National Archives Microfilm Publications

M1944, *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (the Roberts Commission), 1943–1946* (187 rolls)

A3380, *Microfilm Copies of Reports from the Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operations Received from the Allied Military Government, 1943–1946* (23 rolls)

National Archives Publications

A description for Record Group 239 is located in the *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States, Volume II, Record Groups 171–515*, compiled by Robert B. Matchette et. al., (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC: 1995).

Further information about RG 239 and other National Archives holdings related to the looting, identification, recovery, and disposition of cultural property during and after World War II can be found in *Holocaust-Era Assets: A Finding Aid to Records at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland*, compiled by Greg Bradsher. (Washington, DC, National Archives and Records Administration, 1999).

Additional information concerning the Holocaust may be located on our web site at www.archives.gov.

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